

## What about the universalistic texts?

There are a number of verses that appear at first glance to teach that the atonement is universal and that God desires the salvation of all men. These cannot teach this or it would mean that the Bible contradicts itself. In many places God declares that only his chosen people will be saved and that Christ died for these alone. [See, *Doctrines of Grace Texts.*] What is the answer?

As with all Biblical difficulties the answer is to study the verses carefully in context. Such study shows that they do not teach this at all. In many cases, if they were allowed to teach this, they would teach too much by affirming that there is no hell and condemnation of sinners but all are saved. This is the error of universalism. This shows why glib quotes of these verses out of context by Arminians is so reckless. The texts include: Ps 145:9; Ezek 33:11; 18:23; Matt 23:37; Lk 13:34; Jn 3:16; 1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pt 3:9; 1 Jn 2:2, 4:14; Rev 22:17.

Clearly we cannot discuss all these here, but there are common factors.

1. *'All' does not always mean every living person.* The Greek word means a variety of things such as: every, all of a kind, all of some kinds, some of all kinds, some of some kinds, all of a few etc. Often the Bible restricts 'all' to a small group of people. For example: Matt 10:22; Mk 5:20, 11:32, 5:20; Lk 3:15; Jn 3:26; Acts 19:19; Rm 16:19 etc.
2. *'World' does not always (in fact not often) mean every living person.* The Greek word means: the universe, earth, people, local people, a certain group, the world system, the reprobate, Gentiles and elect believers, We can see how varied the meaning of the word is just in John's Gospel alone. In Jn 3:16 it cannot mean everyone or Jn 3:17 (and 1:29) would teach that there is no hell. The context must determine the meaning.
3. *God does not have two contradictory wills.* Therefore, if God has said that some are chosen to destruction (Prov 16:4, Rm 9:21-22), then it cannot be his desire to save all. His will is all-powerful; if he desires a person's salvation, they will certainly be saved.
4. *God does not change.* Therefore those he loves are loved to the end. He does not love some and then stop loving them to condemn them.
5. *The universal emphasis was often to correct narrow thinking.* Many early Christians, especially Jews, held that salvation was for the few and that praying and witnessing to certain groups/individuals was forbidden.

The key issue is to examine the context carefully. In 1 Tim 2:4, if 'all' means everyone, then it also means everyone in v1-2, thus commanding that we pray for everyone on earth. It would also teach universalism in v4. We must read scripture carefully and wisely.

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